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SUBJECT: CHINA'S BLOGS: NATIONALISM, SEX AND ONLINE
VIGILANTES

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[1](#)B. 05 BEIJING 17896
[1](#)C. 06 BEIJING 2682

Classified By: Political Section Internal Unit Chief Susan A. Thornton.
Reasons 1.4 (b/d).

Summary

[1](#)1. (C) The blossoming world of blogs, ranging from patriotic to religious to racy, is captivating China's surging population of Internet users, with some unexpected results.

-- A blog petition launched by a popular television anchor calling for the Forbidden City Palace Museum to boot Starbucks from its premises in January has incited intense debate in media, academic and policy circles.

-- A famous sexologist's blog post on wife-swapping touched off an online skirmish with a Christian blogger.

-- A woman who crushed a kitten on video was exposed by bloggers and forced to publicly apologize.

Beyond these notable cases, the proliferation of blogs trumpeting patriotic causes poses a conundrum for the authorities, who want to foster national pride but also fear the emergence of online mass movements that could harm social stability or threaten Party rule. Despite extensive official efforts aimed at controlling Internet content, no consensus has emerged about who should be responsible for keeping blogs within the bounds of what the Government deems appropriate. In this context, although traditional redlines apply, blogs offer the broadest space of any media for airing (sometimes sensitive) views, contacts told us. As such, blogs are bolstering one of the biggest social changes of the last generation: The unprecedented ability of Chinese people to communicate with one another. End Summary.

China Blogs by the Numbers

[1](#)2. (C) More than 20 million Chinese have launched their own web logs on the Internet as of the end of 2006, official statistics indicate. Year-end figures also show that the country has more than 137 million netizens (although the true number is almost certainly higher), a rise of 23.4 percent over the previous year, according to the state-run China Internet Network Information Center. In the blogosphere, the

vast majority of sites are personal journals meant for consumption by a small circle of friends and relatives, said Zhao Mu (protect), the head of Internet portal Sohu.com's blog hosting service. He added that Sohu.com, home to approximately 5 million personal sites, is among the three most popular portals in China, with Sina.com and BlogChina also hosting millions of blogs.

Forbidden Starbucks: Thanks a Latte (But No Thanks)

13. (C) Blogging in China made international headlines in January when popular China Central Television anchor Rui Chenggang used his personal site to call on the Forbidden City Palace Museum to evict its Starbucks outlet. The message struck a chord among netizens, attracting half a million supporters to sign an online petition. In addition, dozens of domestic newspapers ran articles about the petition. The museum responded by promising to review the situation and make a decision about Starbucks' presence by June, the official Xinhua news service reported. (Note: As of February 26, the cafe is still there.) In statements to the media, Rui, who has traveled repeatedly to the United States and spent one year at Yale University on a fellowship, has denied any intent to fan nationalist fervor. Instead, his online activism was meant to inspire others to safeguard China's historical elics, Rui has told the press. In a recent conversation with Emboff, Rui commented that he enjoys Starbucks himself but does not feel it should be located in a national heritage site, equating it to putting "a foreign cafe in the White

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House." Other contacts surmised that less noble goals motivated Rui's campaign, suggesting that as a celebrity, he is most interested in attracting attention to himself. "It was a clever bit of showmanship," said Zhao.

Seeds of Cyber-Nationalism

14. (C) Zhao added, however, that the anti-Starbucks campaign underscores the power nationalist messages can carry in today's China -- and the quickness and efficiency with which blogs can disseminate them. In fact, blog content that spurs extremist passions is precisely the kind of material the Government would like to control. Zhao recalled the anti-Japan rallies in April 2005 (ref B), noting that planning for the protests spread mainly via web sites, e-mails and cell phone text messages. The Government is not necessarily afraid of isolated cases of individuals posting contrarian or sensitive material on their blogs, Zhao said. Instead, the paramount concern that a mass movement might emerge, born on blogs or through another electronic medium, to reduce the Government's maneuvering room on a sensitive issue or challenge Party authority.

15. (C) Nationalistic blogs remain among the most popular sites for China's netizens. The blog of Beijing University literature professor Kong Qingdong, who is widely known for his nationalistic views on foreign policy issues, particularly Japan, is a regular feature on China Daily's weekly lineup of most-visited Chinese blogs. Blogger and China Youth Daily editor Qiu Haiping launched a cyberstorm recently when he urged Chinese netizens to view an on-line video clip called "The Rape Of Nanking" and to be sure to share it with their children.

16. (C) Yun Jie, a scholar at the Chinese Academy of

Social Sciences Institute of Political Science who focuses on Internet issues, downplayed the notion that blogs themselves are stoking nationalism in China. Other important influences are at work, from how history is taught in schools to China's new economic clout. Blogs are, however, a fast, convenient and unfiltered outlet for communicating strong views, including about China's rising status on the world stage, Yun maintained.

Who Should Implement Controls?

¶7. (C) Against this backdrop, blogs are China's most open forum for freewheeling discourse. Internet service providers, many of which have blog hosting services, constitute the country's first private media and sit in a gray zone of propaganda control (ref A). For a Government that does not view a genuinely free media, including the Internet, as conducive to social stability, how to regulate blogs has become a central question, our contacts said. Some say the State Council Information Office or the Ministry of Culture should take the lead. Others, including Yun of CASS, contend that Internet portals themselves should be answerable for content that crosses censors' red lines. For now, it appears that the State Council Information Office (SCIO) is nominally in charge, said Zhao of Sohu, adding that Sohu's service allows bloggers to post whatever they want. Zhao related that the SCIO employs hundreds of censors who monitor Sohu and other blog hosting services for inappropriate content. When cybersleuths hit upon such topics, they have the technical ability to block access or "erase" a page. But sensitive content inevitably slips through. "There are not enough people to check every blog out there," said Yun of CASS.

¶8. (C) To help officials more easily discern who is writing what, the Government is considering instituting a rule requiring netizens to register their blogs using real names, even if they sign their entries with a pseudonym, the Xinhua News Service has reported. Yun and other contacts told us such a rule would be impossible to enforce for technical reasons. Determined Internet users are generally able to find ways to mask their identities online. Moreover, such a measure misses the point, said He Jiangtao, the web-savvy Beijing bureau chief of Citizen Magazine. He stressed that the people who are willing to go public with the most controversial views are usually

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